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AUTHOR	Fincher, Cameron
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ABSTRACT

This essay discusses changes in higher education management over the last several decades, focusing on the "mystiques" of the 1990s, total quality management (TQM) and diversity. It notes that since the 1950s, higher education has witnessed many fads in institutional management, from management by technique to management by style to management by process. The essay goes on to examine how TQM has once again focused higher education management on processes in the form of inputs and outcomes. It is argued that, to some extent, TQM is a distraction from other principles important to higher education, namely access, equity, autonomy, and diversity. The essay maintains that diversity itself has developed a special mystique and become a code word for the resolution of complex issues in sociocultural values. It is argued that to free higher education from the "mystique of process" into which many institutions have slipped, society needs to examine carefully the internal inconsistencies of quality and diversity. It is concluded that to improve the quality of teaching and learning, higher education leaders must reaffirm and declare often that the cultivation of the human mind and character is their primary responsibility. (MDM)

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by Cameron Fincher

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Quality and Diversity: The Mystique of Process

by Cameron Fincher

Many years ago, in a paper entitled "the demise of administrative mystique," one of us[1] welcomed the adoption of management concepts and methods because our colleges and universities had outgrown the paternalistic bureaucracy that characterized the 1950s. Bureaucratic notions of work experience, time-in-rank, and institutional allegiance was an improvement over the benevolent autocracy of former years, but continued growth and expansion required more efficient ways of enrolling students, scheduling classes, reporting grades—and distributing paychecks.

Efficiency—as well as experience—was increasingly important, and the replacement of data processing equipment using punch-cards with such marvels as computers using magnetic tape and disks for storing and retrieving data was a model of efficiency to be emulated. In the adoption of modern management, accounting, and business systems there was the promise of more "openness" in administrative decision making—and proof that the institutional budget was no longer located "in the president's hip pocket."

The advent of "the management revolution" in higher education, welcome though it was, quickly gave evidence of substituting technique for experience—and some of us were concerned that management concepts and principles would create their own mystique. The advocacy of systems analysis, PPBS, MBO, ZBB, and total information systems did indeed spur an inordinate concern with technique at a time when institutions were under great pressure to: (1) improve their effectiveness, as well as efficiency; (2) achieve excellence, as well as equal opportunities for all participants; and (3) operate on a principle of shared authority, as well as implement effectively policy decisions that were increasingly centralized. Among the buzz words of the day were financial crunch, mismanagement, cost effectiveness, cost/benefits analysis, and computer modeling.

MANAGEMENT-BY-TECHNIQUE

A "natural history" of the management revolution in higher education would disclose the numerous inconsistencies and contradictions we must deal with in academe. Our "national character" is much in evidence as we seek the best of both worlds whenever we are confronted with difficult choices—*or* forced to make decisions under conditions of uncertainty—*or* asked to define alternatives that require some sense of order (or priority) in attaining. In more ways than we care to count, we are the most rational and conservative of all societal institutions, but we are subject to fads and fashions that often border on the foolish. Cynics may rightly suspect that "the bigger we are, the harder we fall."

Since the 1950s we have witnessed many fads in institutional management, planning, evaluation, and assessment. If we examine closely their arrival and departure, we can detect several major trends in the shifting of thought and discussion:

❖ In the shift *from experience to technique* we saw the triumph of management-by-technique, as PPBS was mandated in the 1960s for agencies of federal government and others followed (or thought they were following) their lead;

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❖ In the 1970s we were the designated beneficiaries of zero-based budgeting and management-by-objectives; we also listened to a great deal of rhetoric about shared authority and participative decision making while funding agencies required management, planning, and evaluation in all projects and programs;

❖ By the 1980s we witnessed a shift *from technique to style*: we heard more and more about strategic planning and leadership styles; "a great communicator" occupied the White House and many other presidents gave "wonderful speeches" in which they "marketed the university;" some may have been "hired" or "fired" by the way in which they handled sixty-second statements on evening newscasts;

❖ During the 1980s, however, *style was rapidly becoming process*; in the latter phase, a technocratic bureaucracy superceded paternalistic and benign bureaucracies we had known in the past; administrivia reached an all-time high with desktop computers (with dot-matrix printers), the cellular telephone and the FAX machine; no one bothered about the declining quality of written communications;

❖ In the 1990s, leadership in higher education has become increasingly passive, as governors and national commissions serve as major spokesmen on educational issues and needs.

THE MYSTIQUE OF THE 1990S

Throughout the years in which we ricocheted from experience to technique to style to process, we witnessed the interplay of other opposing tendencies that are characteristic of our national character—and we endowed each new "solution to our problems" with a mystique that does not speak well of our reputations as scholars, scientists, and specialists in advanced fields of higher learning.

Among the opposing tendencies clearly evident in national and discussion are: (a) our difficulties in distinguishing between *efficiency* and *effectiveness* in institutions of higher learning; (b) our continuing search for *excellence* and *equity* in education at all levels; (c) our inconsistencies of *centralization* and *decentralization* in the administration, management, and governance of universities; and (d) our failure to appreciate the *centripetal* and *centrifugal* forces that are evident in the various educational programs and services we provide.

In our more fanciful moments we can imagine a special law of complementarity and believe that by the rapid alternation of attention to opposing tendencies, we will eventually reach the desirable ends of both. In each of these we seemingly act on a premise of, "First one, then the other" and we often contradict ourselves by assuming that whatever the agenda of the day, it will serve as a precedent (if not a permanent solution) for solving our problems. Once convinced that we have solved a problem, we endow the solution with a mystique as "a general and necessary solution" and we fail to recognize the same problem or its solution when it occurs again in a few short years.

Once . . . we have solved a problem, we endow the solution with a mystique as "a general and necessary solution". . . .

Most of all, we fail to recognize that in vital and self-organizing institutions pulsation is our best proof that institutions are living, breathing, maturing entities with many organismic features. Indeed, intake and outcome, expansion and contraction, differentiation and integration, are their most distinctive and common characteristics.

THUS, in much of what we observe in 1993, we can see satisfactory solutions that have become irritating problems—and we can see perennial problems that are like "existential dilemmas;" our solutions will always be momentary and the best we can do is "to cope." We can observe such problems in whatever concerns may be addressed in the advocacy of "Total Quality Management" and the rhetoric of multipluralism.

THE MYSTIQUE OF TQM

In "Total Quality Management" we supposedly have an active concern with inputs, process, and outcomes—but we should ask if we are not returning to *process* after an excessive concern with results (that we could not define and assess, as well as our critics expected). And in the acceptance of another catchy acronym, are we not contributing to a mystique of management-by-process? Indeed, at least one of us is amazed that TQM is not "Total Process Management." We are told that TQM includes all phases of design, development, production, and marketing, and we have known for years that many jobs can be enriched by the involvement of employees in the different phases of production.

We are not told, however, how dysfunctional "process" can become when it is carried to extremes. Behavior and beliefs do indeed become stereotyped, even superstitious, when process becomes the objective of specific functions and activities. We are reminded of wasps who are compelled to go through their ritual of attack-and-sting, even though a spider may be presented to them dead and ready to be eaten. Many faculty committees, when enamored with process, become captives of their own deliberations and will often delay or procrastinate in the name of established guidelines. More often than not, the charges to faculty committees (and the procedures being followed) permit far more discretion than committee members are willing to take. Some faculty members continue to attack-and-sting long after an issue is dead.

Before embracing TQM, some of us would hope that someone (with experience and detachment) could answer the following questions:

❖ Is there anything to TQM other than another overly publicized effort to solve difficult problems with aphorisms and anecdotes; should we not remember the lesson of Lee Iaccoca and Frank Borman, one a "charismatic" executive who "managed by walking about" on television and the other a heroic astronault who could not "earn his wings every day" because he lacked charisma?

❖ Is TQM a brand name like "Kleenex" that is grossly unfair to many others selling the same product? Or, is it a "new nomenclature for planning, management, and assessment concepts with which institutional leaders should be quite familiar?

❖ How does *it* relate to participative management, as advocated since the early 1970s?

❖ How does it differ from other management concepts and principles encouraging planning, goal-setting, assessment, and feedback—and as those concepts have been advocated and promoted?

❖ Why the mystique of "total quality" when: (a) "downsizing" in industry and business is the means to payroll reduction—and it may be no more than a cynical way of increasing profits by manipulating productivity figures? (b) we are never told how "restructuring" differs from re-organization, reform, and other perfectly usable terms in the English language?

❖ What is the relevance of TQM for the improvement of learning and teaching?

❖ If concepts of "Total Quality Management" are to be used in higher education, would they not serve better if they were applicable to large-scale systems, the global environment, or the "Spaceship Earth?"

❖ And where are the concepts that enlighten our comprehension of: (a) human capabilities, and their limitations as well as their potential? (b) the nonrenewable resources needed in production and distribution of goods and services, as well as the renewable resources within society? and (c) the basic fact-of-life in self-organizing systems that alterations in one component of the larger system may have unanticipated and undesirable effects in other components?

To some extent, TQM is a distraction to the issues and concerns discussed by Grady Bogue[2] in his book, *The Evidence of Quality*. Bogue asks specifically if quality is, "purchased at the expense of other principles important to American higher education—access, equity, autonomy, diversity—or does it enrich and support these principles?" Skeptics must surely ask if quality is on a collision course with such principles—especially diversity!

THE MYSTIQUE OF DIVERSITY

In higher education diversity has a special mystique. Many of us have often spoken or written of diversity as the major strength of our institutions, their programs and services, and their resources, talents, and expertise. On occasion we regard diversity in society as ensuring open, divergent pathways to common goals or objectives of comparable quality. And over the past twenty years we have read much about institutions of higher learning *with* pluralistic constituencies—and diverse programs, services, and activities.

More recently diversity has become a code word for the resolution of complex issues in sociocultural values (where conflict has long been evident). We also hear diversity used as a moral solution to societal problems; in such cases, the term is used with an overtone of moral certainty, subjective certitude, and righteous indignation. If we listen carefully, we can be transported back to the 1960s when the intensity of a belief was assumed to be its validity. For examples: (a) When we feel so intensely about a belief, doesn't that lend credence, if not utility, to our belief? and (b) Where there is moral certainty, should there not be a stronger commitment to the values implicit in the belief?

In brief, we have in diversity a word that was once used in "good conjunction" with pluralism—and in higher education we undoubtedly have the most diverse system of any nation on earth. In the 1990s, nonetheless, we use the word diversity in confusing and misleading ways. If the term means a desirable degree of cultural diversity, with recognition that other cultures have much to offer in a pluralistic society—such usage implies a national need to extend and broaden curricular offerings, the necessity of learning more about other nationalities, traditions, and customs, *and* the interdependence of the world's people in a global environment.

If, however, diversity has become a code word for the equality or basic identity of cultural values, it implies that the validity and utility of cultural values are equivalent and must be accorded equal respect. Thus, it is ironical that diversity is now an objective we should pursue in the name of multipluralism. To some critics, our institutions, programs, and services are not diverse enough; our students and faculties are not diverse enough; and we will forego all entitlements to the 21st century if we do not diversify further. In a more realistic sense, diversity has become a word with no "common" meaning or significance. We must wonder if some advocates do not use the term in substitute of the phrase, "turn-about is fair play;" some usages suggest a denigration

. . . diversity has become a word with no "common" meaning or significance.

of western civilization in all matters pertaining to cultural differences. To some proponents, cultural diversity can be obtained only through the admission of more students from non-western cultures and the appointment of more faculty members who are representative of the various nations, societies, and subcultures in our global economy.

Much to our embarrassment, no one has norms, standards, or criteria whereby minimal, typical, optimal, or reasonable diversity can be recognized once it has been achieved. Advocates of diversity are like the labor leader who was asked, "What does organized labor want?" His reply was, "Ten percent more!" If we can assume that the labor leader was talking about wages, we cannot make a similar assumption about educational outcomes and rewards. We can infer, however, that some advocates are

talking about "a fair share" of educational benefits, about an undefined equity in access, opportunity, and outcomes. If they are, our quest for diversity will be more challenging than we recognize. Some proponents, it would appear, are unduly militant and their meaning of diversity may be "our turn to dispense advantages, rewards, and benefits." If this inference is correct, we can expect an intensification of frustration in our institutions of higher education and more displaced aggression against the intellectual and cultural values that have sustained universities since the 17th century.

WHERE DOES QUALITY AND DIVERSITY LEAD?

In an open, voluntary, multipluralistic society where does the simultaneous pursuit of *quality* and *diversity* take us? In what ways does the interplay between two apparently opposite tendencies differ from the related issues of effectiveness versus efficiency, and excellence versus equity?

In the interactions of quality and diversity—as educational values or principles, and as they are currently discussed—we have the kind of issue we should be quite familiar with; we are again pursuing different goals or objectives simultaneously without appropriate attention to their inconsistencies. We also may have conflict in the possibility that neither quality nor diversity—as social goals—are deeply engrained in the American national character. Thus, we are much too passive in supposing that the issues of quality and diversity will be resolved by others, such as federal courts, state legislatures, national commissions, accediting associations, or various funding agencies.

The difficulties in higher education begin with our confused definitions and our lack of adequate norms, standards, and criteria in addressing our national need to improve education at all levels. The difficulties are compounded by the multiple, not-always-compatible purposes of higher education and our lack of confidence in outcomes we can measure, assess, or evaluate for purposes of improvement, renewal, or reform.[3]

In the dissemination of knowledge we defer to the authority and responsibility of classroom instructors, basing our judgment of teaching qualifications and effectiveness almost entirely on the academic credentials of individuals. Should we take seriously public demands of the evaluation of teaching effectiveness, many academic department heads would not know where to begin. Just as faculty members have been appointed on grounds other than their teaching, so have administrators been chosen for reasons other than their ability to assess, evaluate, and make sound judgments concerning teaching and learning. As a result, we leave the evaluation of student learning entirely to classroom instructors and we assume that deans and department heads know who their best teachers are.

To free ourselves from the "mystique of process" into which many colleges and universities have slipped, we should examine carefully the internal inconsistencies of quality and diversity—and we should not accept invitations to debates in which we should not be drawn. Institutions of higher education can assist society and state in solving many problems, but they cannot solve social, legal, political, or economic problems that state and society are unwilling to solve. Given such possibilities, are the following conclusions not in order?

To diversify further our programs, services, and activities, we must have sound educational reasons—and *not* merely social, legal or political reasons—for doing so;

To serve the rapidly expanding needs of our increasingly pluralistic society, we must receive better guidance and assistance from state and society—and from our multiple constituencies; the educational cake of advantages and benefits cannot divided fairly, if it must be divided incessantly;

To improve the quality of learning and teaching in our schools and colleges: (a) we must begin where we are—and work with what we

(b) we must reaffirm and declare often that the *cultivation* of human minds and character is our primary responsibility; and (c) we must recognize that the range and complexity of our attitudes, beliefs, and values require a unifying core of beliefs and values *and* a viable code of ethics and morality that extends to all participants and constituencies!

And throughout all efforts to achieve quality, or any other educational goal, we must recognize that educational outcomes are: (a) public, as well as private; (b) societal, as well as individual; and (c) eventual or deferred, as well as immediate and direct. In such outcomes, the public interest is a matter of pervasive importance. Whatever else education may be, it is an investment in the future and dividends will be paid to generations that will be born in another decade, in another century.❖

FOOTNOTES

[1]Cameron Fincher, "The Demise of Administrative Mystique" (*Intellect*, May 1973, pp. 499-501).

[2]Grady Bogue & Robert L. Saunders, *The Evidence for Quality: Strengthening the Tests for Administrative and Institutional Effectiveness* (Jossey-Bass, 1992).

[3]See *Assessment, Improvement, and Cooperation: The Challenge of Reform in Higher Education* (Institute of Higher Education, University of Georgia, 1991).

THIS ISSUE . . .

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